



**Interview with Gerald L. Gordon of the  
Fairfax County Economic Development Authority  
Conducted by Ross and Nan Netherton on May 31, 1991**

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**Nan Netherton:** This is Friday May 31, 1991. We're in the offices of Economic Development Authority of Fairfax County. Gerry Gordon, Director. Nan and Ross Netherton interviewers.

[Recording Paused]

**Ross Netherton:** Yeah. Well, I wanted to start with a quotation that Nan found. September 1980 *Scientific American*. Now that's a source that you wouldn't expect to find history in [laughter].

**Nan Netherton:** It came from your office.

**Ross Netherton:** A quote from Charles Gullledge. And he said, "We did not want to be a bedroom community for Washington. Our objectives were to control the quality of growth to attract corporate headquarters and high technology organizations rather than heavy industry and also to attract all of the supporting infrastructure; small business, shopping centers and the like." And he was talking about Fairfax County. And I wanted to start out and ask, from where you have watched all this, is this a pretty accurate description of what the objective was for the 1980s and beyond?

**Gerald Gordon:** Yeah, Chuck Gullledge had something of a unique ability to see far into the future long before other people were able to. So, he was accurate. He was a member of that 1978-[19]79 Blue Ribbon Panel as it's become known. And the Panel set the tone for the 1980s. 1980s were, as we suggested, were based on the lessons of the [19]70s, and as Mr. Gullledge suggested, the recognition and the fact that Fairfax had become a bedroom community to the District of Columbia. That with increasing traffic, congestion in the metropolitan area, the time required

to get to jobs in the District of Columbia from the bedroom communities was increasing, and that it made sense that it supported the right jobs in Fairfax County for Fairfax County residents. The other things that that Blue Ribbon Panel recognized were that in Fairfax, the percentage of the real estate tax base that came from the commercial industrial side was less than 12 percent, and had fluctuated between 9 and 14 percent erratically for several years. Yet every tax dollar that a business contributed it took back only ¢36 in public services. Every tax dollar that a resident contributed to the tax base took back a \$1.64 in public services, essentially the difference being the public school system. But therefore it behooved the county again to attract business to the county to help offset the cost of public services for residents and for everyone else. So, in that Blue Ribbon commission, and the report of that commission, they recommended several things to address that set of issues. A goal was established to reach a point where 25 percent of the real estate tax base came from non-residential sources and that goal was met in 1986, I believe. We had gone up as high as 27.2 percent and we're back down in the 25-26 range now. But residents of Fairfax County now can work in Fairfax County. 53 percent of the county's population that works, works in Fairfax County and only 47 percent goes outside. I'm not sure what the figure was in 1960, 1970, 1980, but it was considerably higher going outside, and the real estate tax bases increased. So, the Blue Ribbon Panel in the [19]70s clearly set the tone for the [19]80s. We're no longer a bedroom community to the District of Columbia. We're no longer heavily dependent upon Federal jobs or Federal contracting. Our most recent estimates, which are about a year old now, indicate that about one out of every ten jobs in Fairfax County is associated with the federal government either contracting or direct federal employment. That's considerably different than in the past.

**Ross Netherton:** Mhmm, yeah.

**Gerald Gordon:** Even in federal procurement the Defense Department used to be the heavy end of that, or the heavy proportion of that spending. Even that's diluted somewhat now so that county companies are now also working on non-defense federal programs. And even within the defense, the sector of defense spending itself, there's no one, or two, or three, major programs for which the federal cut back and expenditures would deal a devastating blow to the county's economy. The diversification of the county has occurred in the [19]80s as well.

**Ross Netherton:** So, even though RMD work, headquarter(?) organizations, workings and so on, are, what I would call, quite portable in the sense that they don't have the big plan investment that the industry would have to make and might keep them in one place or make them think very carefully and long before they

move. Even though this kind of think tank activity is highly portable you don't really feel that Fairfax County's concentration on that makes it gullible to a sudden shift in circumstances. Such as, for example, the deductions of the defense budget and the prospect that there may not be as much defense buildup as there has been in the past.

**Gerald Gordon:** The defense cutbacks are going to hurt specific companies and have hurt some already, but they won't hurt the industry and they won't hurt the whole economy because it's become so diversified. There are some companies that will suffer. Companies are now trying to diversify their services into other products, or even into other markets internationally.

**Ross Netherton:** Did they see this coming and start this diversification, hedging as it were, some years ago?

**Gerald Gordon:** Many of them did. We went and visited, I believe it was, the top fifteen defense contractors in the county about a year and a half ago and asked them what they were doing in preparation for the anticipated cutbacks. And the answers ranged—there were fifteen distinct answers and they ranged from, “We don't need to, actually our business is going to get better” to “We're scared stiff, and we're laying off employees and we're even thinking about relocation”, the whole range of possibilities. There is some validity to the notion that for companies that manage government federal resources, defense resources, that as the amount of hardware becomes less and less, that it requires greater management and greater flexibility or mobility. So, those companies that help the defense department or the federal government manage scarcer resources, also have, may indeed have an expanded role.

**Ross Netherton:** How widely was— you mentioned Gullidge as being a prophet perhaps in his own at the time and a pretty good one as it's turned out. How widely were his views, or his perceptions held in the beginning of the 1980s. I know this Blue Ribbon panel...

**Gerald Gordon:** Yeah, the panel reported shortly after a new Board of Supervisors took office. Jack Herrity was the new chairman. The business community was just starting to grow and was excited by the new prospects. We just left the Jean Packard board era in which growth controls were pretty severe. And I think there was a level of excitement that was fueled by immediate successes in the early [19]80s. Large companies started announcing relocations to Fairfax County, and they were coming from all over the country. And the companies that

started in Fairfax were subcontracting and ultimately becoming contractors themselves. Their operations were expanding and there was a real enthusiasm, it kind of snowballed. I used to tease Mr.[inaudible], who became the chairman of the Authority commission, and I used to tease him that every week we just gave him a new set of initials, and he would stand up and say TRW or EDS or SPC.

**Ross Netherton:** Can you look back now and think of which one of those [laughing] initials was the ground breaker in its time? Was it Mobil?

**Gerald Gordon:** It was Mobil. Yeah, Mobil was a prospect with which the Authority worked before I came and worked with them for at least the legend goes that they worked with them for several years through intermediaries and attorneys and never knew who it was until the very end just before the announcement was made. And when the announcement was made it became clear that not only would they be moving their regional operations here but ultimately they would indeed move their headquarters here. Well that was a Fortune, maybe Fortune 10 company.

**Ross Netherton:** Yes, I remember, what was the year?

**Gerald Gordon:** Well, it would have been early [19]80s, early [19]82 maybe.

**Ross Netherton:** Yeah.

**Gerald Gordon:** But that put Fairfax County on the map. One of the early things that we confronted in our advertising programs started after the Blue Ribbon Panel report and the influx of funds into our advertising budget. One of the things that we confronted early on was the notion that Fairfax County sounded rural. Didn't sound because of the word, the connotation of the county, didn't sound like it had a business— it was a business environment. And Mobil helped us change that, those early advertising all had pictures for the Capitol and the monuments downtown to associate Fairfax as part of the Washington Metropolitan area and it helped. Mobil just, it did it, everybody knew where Mobil was.

**Ross Netherton:** This sounds, as you said, the announcement followed years, literally years of negotiation, this sounds like all through, at least say the [19]70s, there was quiet developmental or promotional work going on to attract, well to really put it in another way, to really pursue Gullledge's forecast or his set of objectives, his statement of objectives. Who was doing that? Was that solely the EDA?

**Gerald Gordon:** There was an EDA and it has been—

**Ross Netherton:** Since the [19]60s, I think.

**Gerald Gordon:** Yeah 1965—

**Nan Netherton:** 1964.

**Gerald Gordon:** That's right, October of [19]64. But it was, I'm not sure how it operated, but it did not operate the way that we operate. That's not to suggest that it was a half-hearted effort, but it wasn't.

**Ross Netherton:** Well as we know, it wasn't funded on a scale where it could be very much more than simply, perform that kind of clearing house of information locally.

**Gerald Gordon:** That's right. And a lot of what took place took place anyway. Companies started growing in Fairfax as opposed to coming here. A lot of the people who were starting to build office space, moving out from the District, were doing some marketing of their own. When a company like Mobil came in, companies grew up around it in order to provide services and goods to Mobil. It created an image for us so that it helped attract other companies as well and at some point you see in the advertising, if you look at it historically, you see Mobil starts to appear in the body and the copy. So, a lot of it was haphazard, there was no real central focus that I'm aware of other than the, except the previous Authority, as it was previously constituted.

**Ross Netherton:** By the way, when did the— this gets into really the real estate side of it, but it's a question I wanted to ask Gerald later, when did the first high-rise [laughter] office building or cluster occur in the county?

**Gerald Gordon:** I want to say it was down in Bailey's, but I don't know when and I wouldn't swear to it. The first office park was over here in West Park in Tysons Corner, that one I know. And that gave some prestige too because BDM expanded and continued to grow in the office park and Earl Williams, who was Chuck Gullledge's predecessor as chairman of the commission, took a very active role as well. He was another individual who was able to foresee great things for the county. So, those developments did help.

**Ross Netherton:** Maybe the principal ones if they weren't chronologically the first, they were certainly the ones that hold people up to what one of these [inaudible]. And of course you had, you mentioned before the Beltway consultants TRW and MITRE and some of these companies that are there, and have been since the—

**Gerald Gordon:** PRC.

**Ross Netherton:** They were the three or four letters in terms of the high tech, think tank government and corporate services, selling services industry. So, they're Fairfax County's beginnings with that kind of development maybe, I guess, based on the Beltway and the companies that sprang up there. All through this, and I asked Nan this question this morning just as I was, well you got me to begin to think about [laughter].

[Intercom Beeps]

**Gerald Gordon:** Excuse me.

[Recording Paused]

**Ross Netherton:** Let me skip ahead to something that I guess is basic. Where did the investment cap go, come from, for the expansion of the big merchant expansion in the [19]80s? How much of it was locally generated? How much came from outside? How much came from outside the United States?

**Gerald Gordon:** I don't know the answer to the last part, my suspicion is not a great deal came from outside the U.S. A lot of it was financed locally. I don't know what amount, what percentage, but a great deal of it was financed locally. Particularly in the early [19]80s when there was, we didn't have that national recognition. My suspicion is, and I have no way to support it, that as the [19]80s progressed the investment from outside, although not extra nationally, grew in proportion, but I have no way of knowing that proportion.

**Ross Netherton:** That says to me then that by the early [19]80s, Fairfax County own's economy had generated enough momentum, enough activity then to generate its own investment capital.

**Gerald Gordon:** Yes, yes I think that's accurate, by the early to mid [19]80s.

**Ross Netherton:** What do you foresee here are the centers of growth in the county, that if we follow out Gullledge's view of things we'll have to be prepared to watch? Certainly, we've got Tysons Corners, Springfield, Fair Oaks, and Reston that we can see now as having developed as real centers. Are there others you think will emerge?

**Gerald Gordon:** Yes, there are. First, in relation to Tysons Corner, the Urban Land Institute is a professional research association, and they've indicated that if you list all the jurisdictions in the United States by the amount of square feet commercial space that exists, that Fairfax County would be fourth on the list following New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. If Tysons Corner were an entity in of itself, jurisdiction per say, it would be eighth or ninth on the list depending on whose figures you accept. With 23 million square feet of office space, more space here than there is in Richmond, Roanoke and Norfolk put together. More space here than Denver, Miami, Pittsburgh. So, Tysons is clearly the business node in Fairfax County, if you will.

**Nan Netherton:** Can you give us documentation on that, that we can take with us.

**Gerald Gordon:** I can attend to it.

**Nan Netherton:** Okay.

**Gerald Gordon:** The other centers that will be growing up to join Tysons and Springfield and Merrifield— Merrifield gets left out of a lot of lists because nobody thinks of it, but with Mobil, certainly and a number of other large employers, Khaki for instance, they have a substantial amount of office space as well. Reston, Herndon, Dulles is a very large market.

**Ross Netherton:** And I've also seen it said that Route 28, the Dulles Route 28 area is going to be—

**Nan Netherton:** Is that where Westfields is?

**Gerald Gordon:** It is. It has the potential to become a very very large commercial development area. Depending on how the downzoning issues workout, they are a little bit in a position of favor because they have a piece of state legislation and a local agreement with the county for their own tax district, which enables them to expand, and keeps them out of some that downzoning question. But they have the capacity once there's an adequate demand for the space to expand and become very

very large. But, the biggest area, potentially, is the [Routes] 50-66 area, Fairfax center region, and that market could someday dwarf is perhaps too strong, but it could certainly overshadow what we have over in Tysons Corner.

**Ross Netherton:** Let me come back to Gulledge again and after reading him, one of the questions that popped into my mind is what kind of strategy do you suppose, or can one suppose, would achieve these objectives? And I'm thinking of strategy now simply in terms of partly financing and partly also attracting and accommodating the whole business of how do you achieve and, once you achieve it, how do you make it work? Are these taxing districts something that are part of, or should be part of the strategy we might have to go through?

**Gerald Gordon:** I think that situation was a unique situation that was negotiated in a very clever way. I don't think those are going to be—

**Ross Netherton:** General tools.

**Gerald Gordon:** Yeah, not here at least, in Fairfax.

**Ross Netherton:** Well then, what is the prospect for the [19]90s in terms of, you mentioned downzoning, that's a part of this whole mechanism of controlling growth. Gulledge spoke about wanting to control the quality of growth. What does that mean in terms of this strategy and this blueprint for growth? How do you do that? We've seen unsuccessful attempts to control, I guess you'd say, the quantity of growth that we had in the 1971-[19]75 period, which had more [inaudible] than we had in the [19]90s, the downzoning. But those haven't been welcomed as the way to do it.

**Gerald Gordon:** Yeah. At this point I see two different types of growth. One in terms of the [19]80s growth that the office space market and the [19]90s, or at least the early part of the [19]90s, and I see growth more in terms of the tax base and the number of jobs in the county. The reason I don't concern myself as much with issues like downzoning and new office construction and things of that nature is that we now have almost 20 percent office vacancy rate, which means we have close to 12 million square feet of office space vacant—

**Ross Netherton:** Just quickly, let me interrupt. How does that compare say with D.C?



**Gerald Gordon:** The percentage is low. It's higher than it's ever been in Fairfax County, but relative to national standards.

**Ross Netherton:** Still not what you'd consider dangerous.

**Gerald Gordon:** It depends on how you define it.

**Ross Netherton:** Well—

**Gerald Gordon:** It's not as bad as others.

**Ross Netherton:** Okay.

**Gerald Gordon:** But the research indicates, professional research has indicated for some time that any jurisdiction, typically, will lose between 8 and 10 percent of its job base in a given year, just through normal attrition of companies. So, creation of new jobs by attracting companies, and given the existing office space, that really becomes the target rather than the interest in constructing new office space—

**Nan Netherton:** So, it's because of this expected 8 to 10 percent standard loss per year?

**Gerald Gordon:** That's part of it. With 380,000 jobs in the county, that perhaps isn't the right number but with hundreds of thousands of jobs in a county, 8 to 10 percent is a substantial number. It takes a lot of effort just to— I guess was it *Alice in Wonderland* who said—

**Nan Netherton:** “You have to run faster than you can to just stay in one place.”

**Gerald Gordon:** Stay in place. That's right. So, our focus on growth doesn't necessarily, it isn't dependent upon the construction of space. And that's why I say issues like downzoning become a little bit less critical to us at this point. They're more critical to the developers.

**Ross Netherton:** So, expanding the quantity of land that is really available for commercial and business development, isn't nearly as critical as say it was back when there was a much greater relative shortage of that.

**Gerald Gordon:** That's right. There's about seven percent of the counties land base is zoned for development, for commercial development. And somewhere in

the neighborhood of 44 ½ percent is currently developed, so there still exists some land.

**Gerald Gordon:** Quick question about this part of the quality, if you aim to control the quality, and do so by the strategies that you used to attract new business and retain old, I guess [inaudible]. What prospects do you see for having the labor force that you'll need? What kind of labor force would you want? Are you [inaudible] sure you'll have it?

**Gerald Gordon:** It's an interesting question because overtime I've observed the labor force shortages that we have in the county become different, and it is an issue in attracting a company, obviously, and in retaining companies. For example, AAA went to Florida because of the high cost of labor. They're an entirely clerical type of operation and it's tough to find people—

**Ross Netherton:** That's right, and they had [inaudible].

**Gerald Gordon:** One of the strengths that we've had has always been the ability to, not only to find scientists, technicians, computer people, but technical skills in the county, but to attract those kinds of individuals to Fairfax. We've learned recently that in relation to the NASA program and concerns about it being relocated to Texas, we've discovered that engineers don't want to go to Texas. Because you go to Texas and you work for NASA and when you're done working for NASA or you want to advance yourself by moving to another company, Houston has NASA, that's it. Come to Fairfax and an engineer can go to NASA, can leave NASA, go to TRW, go to BEM or any number of other companies in the county. So, it's more of a career rotation, so it's easier to attract a labor force. But, there was a time when those individuals, those technical skills were in shortage. There certainly was a time, just a few years ago, when blue collar workers and entry level workers were in a shortage. Clerical workers are always in a shortage in this town. And so the quality of the labor force has never been questioned, but there have been some concerns about the number of the availability of certain skills. The county's unemployment rate has not been over 2.2 percent in the eight years I've been here, I believe.

**Nan Netherton:** That's well below the national.

**Gerald Gordon:** The President's Council of Economic Advisors says that 4 ½ percent is for unemployment. We're half that. So, effectively anybody who wants a job can work, there's not a pool to draw from.

**Ross Netherton:** And yet, within that pool, there may be shortages, or it may be difficult to find the right kind, the mix is not perfect, and it never is I'm sure.

**Gerald Gordon:** That's right. Sure.

**Nan Netherton:** We have a lot of information from Earl Williams, which was provided by your office, and we thank you. Do you feel that he, like Gullledge, is a reliable source for not only existing conditions but prognostications?

**Gerald Gordon:** Yes. Earl was also on that Blue Ribbon Panel Committee, I believe. I've always, and this is my own personal point of view, but I've always regarded that there were three people, who in the business community, who really got things going here, and then you'd have to I suppose add Jack Herrity's vision as well from the other side. Earl Williams, and Till Hazel, and Chuck Gullledge were the three who seem to come to everyone's mind when you talk about the early business development in the county. He was clearly prophetic.

**Nan Netherton:** You feel that Till Hazel has a good grasp of present and future conditions?

**Gerald Gordon:** Yeah, I have a lot of admiration for these people because I have trouble seeing what's going to happen tomorrow, but clearly Till, the reason he's been successful has been because he could see what was coming anytime in front of him. If you can't walk faster, get behind him.

[Recording Paused]

**Ross Netherton:** I'm— as I sat down to where I've covered most of the things that I had—

**Nan Netherton:** This last sentence was something you read to me that night, have we covered that?

**Ross Netherton:** No, the quote I gave you from Charles Gullledge in the beginning stopped two sentences from the end. The rest of it is, "the committee report prevailed upon the Board of Supervisors to very substantially increase funding, an objective of the developmental authority," well that we've beaten around already, and then it says "We have met or exceeded the objectives."

**Nan Netherton:** Now that was a 1980 quotation, wasn't it?

**Ross Netherton:** Yeah. That's ten years ago now [laughing].

**Gerald Gordon:** We actually exceed the objectives, some of the objectives a few years after that. There was one other thought that came to me and I lost it.

**Nan Netherton:** I know talking with Earl Williams as I did for a few minutes on the phone, he indicated that under Audrey Moore's administration there had been a great limitation to the growth potential being realized and he was anticipating that with the coming election, perhaps that condition would be eased.

**Gerald Gordon:** That sort of touched on what I'd forgotten, thank you. The Board of Supervisors through the Herrity years, as well as Mrs. Moore's time really deserve some commendation I believe, because they have, they saw the need and they funded it. They effectively put their money where their collective mouth was. Not everything that has happened has been a direct result, but certainly a great deal of what has happened resulted from their foresight as well as the foresight of the business community. Mr. Williams' comment about Chairman Moore, is shared by others. The concern— well she was elected with a very large plurality, majority, three and a half year ago, and immediately we were instructed to refocus our programs. We cut back significantly, almost to the point of eliminating programs to attract new business to the county and began to work with the existing business community in order to make sure that they stayed here as they grew and matured as companies. We also began our convention of visitor's services program at that time, both of which had an impact on the county's tax base which is our mission. The business community, particularly, some of the developers who were directly impacted were concerned about the element of our program was now missing the attraction of new businesses. And we didn't stop working with companies, we just stopped the positive outreach. We sought companies coming to us and we stopped a lot of the advertising and the business attraction selling. You may or may not agree with the approach, but the logic was, that we still needed to expand the county's tax base, but we had to do something about the infrastructure first. And so, these are other means.

**Ross Netherton:** And when you say infrastructures you mean the tax—

**Gerald Gordon:** The road.

**Ross Netherton:** The road. All of these things that contribute here to making an impact for location.

**Gerald Gordon:** That's right.

**Nan Netherton:** Let me ask this. Was there positive effort to recognize that getting, attracting, this high talent pool here was important, but keeping them here was essential? What positive steps were taken, in your opinion, to keep the amenities attractive enough to hold the highly talented pool we have?

**Gerald Gordon:** There's two answers to that. We started, since we weren't visiting companies outside of the area as much [cough] excuse me, our efforts were directed to visiting local companies, find out what their problems were and serve as intermediaries between them and the county. And the problems ranged everywhere from trash collection, curb improvements, and police protection to development and zoning matters. The county at large and the Board of Supervisors did not do a great deal to enhance the programs to retain business in the county. The many actions, whether real or simply perceived of the Board, did have the effect of sending companies outside of the county. The image that the county board brought with it did have the effect of just tainting existing businesses working in Fairfax County, for existing businesses. We had several who left simply because they did not feel loved any longer. Some of that was perception and then there were other circumstances in which companies left the county because of specific policies of the Board of Supervisors. And so, at the same time, they were in that mode we were trying to keep them here. It was a tough sell.

**Ross Netherton:** As I saw described somewhere in this whole thing, I read the new three R's are recruiting, retraining, and repainting [laughing]. What's the prospect that many companies have once they find themselves relocated and growing concerns, but in competition with others not just here, but around the country? And it may be that that's going to be, have to be a way of life for the—well for achieving I guess what Gullledge spoke of as the quality of growth.

**Nan Netherton:** One statement that we both read and agreed with was that with Fairfax County becoming an influence center of its own, Loudoun and Prince William are now not only suburbs, but competitors—

**Gerald Gordon:** Yes.

**Nan Netherton:** In space that might perhaps be more reasonably priced comparatively at a given time to that available in the county.

**Gerald Gordon:** Absolutely, and what we've discovered is that as the developments from the [19]80s started moving out from the District, with the growth of Dulles airport, growth started moving this way, was to meet in the middle and as Dulles expanded, and for two years running was the fastest growing airport in the world. The area around it including Prince William and Loudoun County began to develop as well, and all the companies that we had along the Route 28 corridor in Reston, Herndon. A company can be that far out from the District, then they can be another couple miles. And land values, tax policies and just sort of the general perception that they were wanted there did have the effect of taking a few of our companies. One of the things, or some of the things that kept them in Fairfax, the ones who stayed, was in part the prestige of the Fairfax County education. The public school system is immensely important, much more so today than it ever was ten years ago. More and more companies are making their decisions based on factors that will affect their children or their families. I— if this were a business, I would not move it to Loudoun County. Not meaning to demean their school system, but I would want my children in the Fairfax County school system, it's that simple. I won't take them anywhere else.

**Ross Netherton:** What about not just the public school system, the primary and secondary, but also the higher education and vocational education that make it of course the success the Northern Virginia Community College system has had in terms of the growth and its success its enjoyed. And also, of course George Mason, as our own higher education institution here, but also the fact that in addition to that we've got University of Virginia, VPI, and others also coming in with branches or extension courses for selective and selected types of education. This is important too I should think, and here again Fairfax County would have an advantage over its neighbors anyway, for a good 50 or 100 miles.

**Gerald Gordon:** Yeah. It's an interesting point you raise because George Mason University's reputation has grown and it's benefited the county a great deal, particularly in the computer sciences area and in economics because of the General who won the Nobel Prize a few years ago. Whose face I can see but the name escapes me.

**Ross Netherton:** Buchanan.

**Gerald Gordon:** Yes, James Buchanan, thank you. James, no he's a president. But, and everyone knows about George Mason University it's an essential element and when we compete with other jurisdictions, the only two jurisdictions with which

we compete that have a better standing are the Boston area and the Silicon Valley or Stanford in northern California.

**Ross Netherton:** In California.

**Gerald Gordon:** But the real secret is Northern Virginia Community College and Dr. Ernst, and the programs that they have available and the services they provide to the business community, for some reason is a secret, but it's a phenomenal asset to us.

**Ross Netherton:** We lived through the period in which that system has grown up. We remember it starting out in a warehouse up on Bailey's Crossroads, I think. And the trouble is though, that having been so close to it we really never appreciated the way it evolved into the system it is today. Do you have in mind, looking back on it now, any phases or series of stages that it went through on the way to becoming the valuable educational resource it is now?

**Gerald Gordon:** When I came into the scene it was, what it is [laughter]. It has improved continually, but it was already a very great asset and its programs were flexible enough to provide what business needs. Its conferencing capacity and its training programs, the means by which they tailor the programs to specific industry needs are all very impressive.

**Ross Netherton:** Do you have the impression that it started out in that direction right from the very beginning, that this was the idea of starting that community college?

**Gerald Gordon:** It could have been. Since I wasn't a part of the system at the point I don't know, but Virginia does, I know from previous experience, have a very strong community college system around the state and D.C.

**Ross Netherton:** If that's true, then somebody back there in those days had a lot of the same foresight that recalling from Charlie Gulledge because they saw, even though none of us could look around us and see those, they foresaw that the kind of education, vocational, technical, high tech, if you will, education that the community college has been offering and developed, would be just essential to the sort of, well it would really be a key part of the infrastructure and the education.

**Gerald Gordon:** That's exactly right. It would be interesting to see—

**Ross Netherton:** And that means someone was really very smart.

**Gerald Gordon:** That's exactly right. It would be interesting to see if there were any of the same people involved.

**Nan Netherton:** Well, Dr. Ernst was the third president of Northern Virginia Community College and it really took off with him, so Ross you and I will probably have to talk to him.

**Ross Netherton:** It may very well be that its—

**Nan Netherton:** You mean—

**Ross Netherton:** Something that really parallels his ten years there.

**Nan Netherton:** That's what I think.

**Gerald Gordon:** It's entirely possible.

**Nan Netherton:** Do you have any further questions?

**Ross Netherton:** Well, it's just this one that comes back as you look back in history and it carries on from this conversation we've been having about the policy, the up and down, or on and off atmosphere that's been created as the county's wrestled with the management of growth issue. And of course we're just finishing now a term of Board of Supervisors, where there has been this slow growth, or no growth, or at least if not that extreme, very carefully controlled growth. We had, what was it, about ten or twelve years of, in contrast to that and then in [19]71, [19]75 we had another Board of Supervisors which was elected, and the election there turned on the issue of growth. This time it was more in terms of not the commercialization but the simple business of filling up land and of course it came at a time in [19]71, when the whole country had discovered the environment when national legislation when in fact sometimes we call the [19]70s, the decade the of the environment, the environmental decade. But you see we had, a shift or a dramatic episode or phase, in this, wrestling with this growth issue and we can think of back when we first or shortly after we came into the county, the election of 1956 did just about the same thing. And it turned on the question of whether the county should have a master plan or not, or which kind of master plan. And the chairman of the Board of Supervisors at that time who was a casualty of that turnover, had had some 24 years continuous service on the board. In other



words, that 1956 election interrupted or changed what had been a long period of stability, and where they've no question, no question about what they had to do toward growth had been. So one wonders, how do you explain here, in what we're now living through and seeing in Fairfax County, how do you explain these periodic upheavals if you will, or these periodic revisiting the issue of growth management and having another go at it? Can't we get it settled?

**Gerald Gordon:** I'm not sure it's ever going to be settled. And I think it's— and you can look at other jurisdictions like Loudoun County and Prince William County that are now starting to go through what Fairfax went through ten years ago, and Arlington went through 20 years ago. And it's— the reason I don't think it will ever be settled is that things, nobody is ever going to be happy. There's first there's a need for jobs, but then the jobs come in and there's a need for more roads to support the construction, and then there's—

**Ross Netherton:** In Loudoun.

**Gerald Gordon:** Yeah, and one thing leads to another. And so, if we resolve the roads issue, then people will be accepting, perhaps, of more development which would create a roads problem. Or if they're not accepting— one of the reasons now, that the board is so supportive of our efforts to attract new businesses to the county is because, well there's federal cutbacks, the economy at large is in trouble, there's the banking crisis contributes. We've lost our 8 to 10 percent of the jobs this year. We haven't replaced them as quickly as we have in the past, so there's a higher rate of unemployment. We're starting to hear about it from the constituents. There's a very high rate of underemployment relevant to the past. Maybe I'm just being cynical but if we resolve that set of problems there will be, it will create a void in which, just by the natural laws of life other problems will refill it and it all relates to growth and to—

**Nan Netherton:** Is there, excuse me, I was going to say is there any purposeful effort on the part of the big employers to go into to what some think is the next phase, and that is establishing work stations in the home, so commuting isn't a problem for those people who can work independently and still be productive?

**Gerald Gordon:** I've seen all the literature that suggests that makes a lot of sense, but I haven't seen it being done on a very large scale. Perhaps, as computers continue to mature and become smaller and more usable or portable maybe that will take place, but I haven't seen it.

**Ross Netherton:** Speaking about that, the way that the business plans for the future and manages its growth, and of course we've touched on that earlier when you said that before you visited businesses and asked how they anticipated, how they'd react to such things as defense spending reduction, things like that. Maybe we make a mistake by thinking that the county is the only mechanism we have for controlling or managing growth. The business community itself has to do that simply as part of its operations, and it does a pretty good job, so far. If it doesn't, it usually doesn't survive or has a very rocky prospect. What about understanding this other area and we can look to, and in the private sectors, both management techniques, what about understanding that? How do you see industry, for example, and the business exercising the tools that Gullledge spoke about for really(?) controlling the quality of growth? Surely that isn't something that we have to be depend on the county to do for us.

**Gerald Gordon:** Right. That's right. There are two prime examples that come to mind of the business community taking charge of a process that was going too slowly or was underfunded. Not necessarily through the fault of the county, just shortage of funds. You know in Tysons Corner, the Tytram Association [cough], excuse me, funded and got approval for and saw to fruition the construction and development of tens of millions of, it was probably closer to \$20 million than \$10 million dollars of road improvements in Tysons Corner. Purely at their own expense and at their own suggestion because they saw the advantage of having the ability to have their own employees get in and out and have other companies come into Tysons. When I first came to the Authority, it was eight years ago. This intersection at [Routes] 7-123 was constantly bolloxed up. The traffic would flow 10, 15 miles an hour at rush hour it was deadly, and now it does this most of the day. On a Friday afternoon, or when it snows or rains it's different, but on a day like this it will be free flowing all day long at regular speed limits, and that's due to Tytram.

**Ross Netherton:** Is that due to the Fairfax County achievement?

**Gerald Gordon:** It is, well no it's—

**Ross Netherton:** Or there is a reason why, I guess that's what I was asking. Whether this is something that Fairfax County, you might say, figured out it for itself, on its own.

**Gerald Gordon:** No.

**Ross Netherton:** Or is it—

**Nan Netherton:** Well, it was private industry, wasn't it?

**Gerald Gordon:** Yes, it was.

**Ross Netherton:** Yes. That's what I was thinking.

**Gerald Gordon:** Yeah, no they're transportation, they call it Transportation Management Associations, or TMA's and there are examples throughout the county, and this one was not the first. It was the first in Fairfax.

**Nan Netherton:** What was the mechanism? Was it a group of the users in Tysons Corner who did this or voluntarily got together and said we got to do this or what?

**Gerald Gordon:** That's exactly right, companies including [inaudible]. And the other thing they did was—

**Ross Netherton:** What was the date, do you remember?

**Gerald Gordon:** [19]83, [19]84. They actually became, they came into existence because of the road needs. But, once in existence, they started looking at other business needs in Tysons Corner and came to the realization there was no day care facility in Tysons Corner. All these employees, who are mothers and fathers, have children to drop off, and they created a play and learn day care center which companies put in the money for and brought spaces in and did that entirely on their own. The other example of business contributing to the development of the quality of business and residential life in the county, has to do with the proffers that they contribute when their buildings were built. And I only wish that I knew the number of dollars that were contributed, or the linear feet of highway, it's substantial.

**Ross Netherton:** I've seen some figures on that, spotty of course as they are, but the *New Dominion* for example [inaudible] a magazine of choice here in terms of a lot of things we've been talking about, and I've been reading the back copies of that, and yes, I have seen some, and they are impressive. But this is part of something that we're going to see more of and I'm working with this TRB with the transportation, the new reauthorization of the Transportation Assistance Program that Congress is going to pass this year. It's going to have a heavy emphasis on public private partnerships, and the reason I asked about the date is because there are, as you say, other parts of the country that are [inaudible] these transportation

corporations, but [19]83 is awfully early. So here again, Fairfax County again may very well be pioneering in something that we're going to see develop further in the early [19]90s.

**Nan Netherton:** We need to have some documentation on daycare because that's something I wanted to put in, but we haven't got yet.

**Gerald Gordon:** Okay, the county has a daycare advisory council, I'm sorry—

**Nan Netherton:** Do you have a publication or something that would cover this?

**Gerald Gordon:** I don't believe—

**Nan Netherton:** I know about the daycare thing, I'll call them.

**Ross Netherton:** It's 10:30, you're really putting on too much time here—

**Gerald Gordon:** Wonder if I could just make one sort of summary comment related to—

**Nan Netherton:** Sure, sure.

**Gerald Gordon:** As we were discussing earlier, the companies that come to the county come for a range of reasons, and some companies are attracted by the labor force. Some companies are attracted by the airports or the quality of life or the school system. There are probably 40 or 50 different reasons that would be cited. What makes Fairfax an attractive place to do business, is that it has all those things. Loudoun has the airport. Probably, Fairfax has a better school system, so Fairfax is blessed with a number of attributes and everything that the research indicates people are looking for is here. Over time we've lost one critical element and regained it and lost it again, as you suggested which is the image of the county as a good place to do business. But, even in those years we continued to attract the businesses to the county because of those other facets.

**Ross Netherton:** And this is something that no county can wave a magic wand and have happened to it. It's something that's well, in what I'm doing here, I start out with right after World War II we see the shift from the bedroom community. So, it has taken almost 30 to 40 years, to develop the sound base that Fairfax County has now. And it certainly has had to be guided over that time by some awfully

persistent and awfully, awfully smart individuals. People who saw this possibility and put it all together and that has made a lot of impressive talent.

**Nan Netherton:** We have just about one or two minutes. Do you have any crystal ball ideas about the reversal of this recession that we are experiencing now?

**Gerald Gordon:** In my personal, and only my personal opinion is that I don't see the recession digging any deeper holes, but it'll probably be yet another quarter or two before it starts to get better nationally. Regionally we were hit, but not as badly as some areas, and again some companies are going to suffer, and have suffered, and will continue to suffer, and some may yet go out of business. But by in large the economy is so diversified now that it would take a very deeper percent of a depression to really have a devastating impact on the economy.

**Nan Netherton:** Is anybody talking about beating their swords into plowshares seriously, because we're not going to have good customers all over the world fighting wars?

**Gerald Gordon:** Yes, I've heard the talk. I haven't seen any results, but yeah, I've heard many.

**Ross Netherton:** We used to think that the dependence on the federal government's economic power was a buffer for the whole national Capital area? But if that was true and say some of the earlier dips in the recession, and we don't have it now, we still on the other hand have moved sufficiently far into it a diversified economy so that we have the same buffering protection, but a different kind of buffer, maybe in this matter of diversifications. You seem pretty confident about that. This economy can withstand everything except maybe the depression, it's worldwide and well, I think that we better get—

**Nan Netherton:** We thank you.

**Ross Netherton:** Yes, very very much.

**Gerald Gordon:** Absolutely.

**Nan Netherton:** We appreciate having a chance to talk with you.

**Gerald Gordon:** Thank you.

[End of interview]

**Transcribed by: Skyler Vogelsinger, March 2021.**